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WASHINGTON, DC – In response to deadly violence in Egypt on Sunday, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) calls for a thorough, impartial, and independent investigation to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice in civilian courts and that Egyptian military forces are held accountable for reportedly using excessive force. USCIRF also calls for a portion of U.S. aid to be allocated to the Egyptian government to provide heightened security for religious minority communities.

“USCIRF condemns in the strongest possible terms violence that targeted peaceful protestors, primarily Coptic Orthodox Christians and those Muslims who joined the demonstrations. We offer our heartfelt condolences to the victims and their families,” said USCIRF chair [Leonard Leo](#) .

“The most recent attack clearly demonstrates the ongoing problem of unchecked violence directed against a religious minority. This violence, if unaddressed, threatens the stability of Egyptian society and the future of that nation. USCIRF urges the U.S. government to vigorously press for a prompt and impartial investigation to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice, something that has been elusive in Egypt in previous attacks on religious minorities.

“With parliamentary elections mere weeks away, the Egyptian government must promptly investigate, prosecute those responsible, and deter any future attacks. The government must ensure that this violence does not signal a decisive turning point away from the potential of a democratic future for Egypt,” said Leo.

At least 26 people were killed, mostly Coptic Orthodox Christians, and several hundred injured in downtown Cairo after counter-revolutionary elements confronted and attacked peaceful protestors. The demonstrators were marching to the state television station to protest the September 30 destruction of a church in Aswan, Upper Egypt when armed men attacked them. Responding to the violence, Egyptian military forces reportedly used live ammunition and excessive force, including armored vehicles that deliberately crushed and killed at least six of the protestors. Dozens of people have been detained in connection with the violence and the chairman of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, the de facto head of the Egyptian government, has asked the prime minister to conduct an immediate investigation into the incident.

“USCIRF welcomed the White House statement yesterday condemning the violence and calling for restraint on all sides,” said Leo. “However, more can and must be done. In response to the continued pattern of violence with impunity, USCIRF urges the U.S. government to direct a portion of its \$1.3 billion in military aid toward heightened security for religious minority communities and their places of congregation and worship, particularly Coptic Christians, Sufi Muslims, and Jews,” said Leo.

Earlier this year, USCIRF recommended for the first time that Egypt be designated a “country

of particular concern,” or CPC, for engaging in and tolerating egregious violations of freedom of religion or belief. While religious freedom conditions in Egypt had been deteriorating during the last years of the Mubarak regime, since Mubarak’s ouster on February 11, conditions have further deteriorated. Attacks on minorities, including by Islamist militants imposing extra-judicial punishments, have risen and resulted in dozens of deaths and hundreds of injuries.